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In loving memory of Mark Gruenwald

DEVIL'S REIGN

CHAPTER FIVE

TOP COW PRODUCTIONS

MARVEL COMICS

WOLVERINE / WITCHBLADE

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The story so far...

Mephisto has come to Top Cow's dimension, bent on acquiring souls to make himself more powerful in his new home. Just minutes ago, he completed the first stage of his plan, taking thousands of New Year's revelers' souls to his new hell, leaving only Wolverine, his agent Zoe Culloden and Cyberforce's renegade team-member Ballistic behind in Times Square to wonder just what happened. But they don't have to wonder for long--because Mephisto has more planned for Wolverine. But right now he's more interested in the wielder of the Witchblade: NYPD Detective Sara Pezzini.

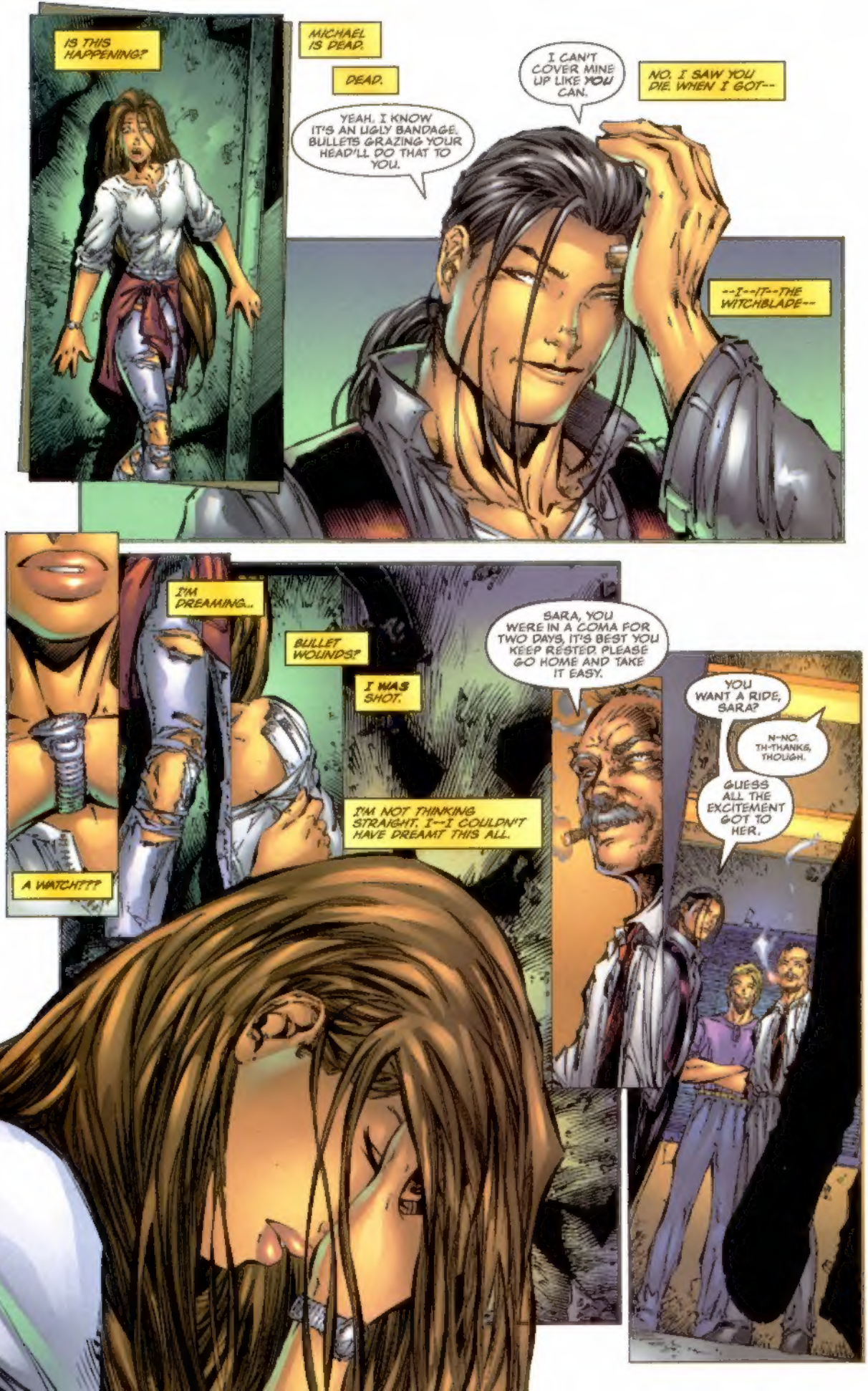
TIMES SQUARE. NEW YEARS DAY. 5:20A.M.
EXACTLY FIVE HOURS AN' TWENTY MINUTES AGO, THIS PLACE WAS FILLED WITH OVER A THOUSAND PEOPLE PARTYIN' WAY TOO HARD.
HARDER'N HUMANLY POSSIBLE--IS A MATTER O' FACT.
SEEMS THE REVELERS HAD A LITTLE ARTIFICIAL ASSISTANCE FROM MEPHISTO--A GUY WHO FANCIES HIMSELF AS THE PHYSICAL INCARNATION O' THE DEVIL.
UNFORTUNATELY, HE'S GOT POWER TO BACK UP HIS CLAIMS.
SONY
SONY
SONY
Coca-Cola
ANY IDEAS, LOGAN?
DARLIN', I HAVE LOTS O' IDEAS.
NO SOLUTIONS, THOUGH.
ME, NEITHER.

THE NAME'S WOLVERINE.
THE LADY WITH ME IS ZOE CULLODEN.
SHE'S AN AGENT FOR AN INTER-DIMENSIONAL INVESTMENT COMPANY CALLED LANDAU, LUCKMAN, AND LAKE.
SEEMS THIS DIMENSION WAS HAVIN' SOME SORT O' PROBLEM THAT ZOE FELT WAS A BIT BEYOND HER AREA O' EXPERTISE--SO SHE CALLED ON ME.
I HAD A HELL O' A TIME FINDIN' ZOE, BUT WITH THE HELP O' A FINE LADY NAMED BALLISTIC, I FOUND MY WAY TO HER.
WOULDN'T MIND HER FIREPOWER WITH ME, RIGHT NOW, SEEIN' AS HOW THINGS'LL PROBABLY GET UGLY SOON, BUT SHE'S ONE--OFF LOOKING FOR HER SISTER.
THIS ALTERNATE DIMENSION STILL ISN'T RIGHT TO ME.
I MEAN, THIS NEW YORK LOOKS JUST LIKE THE ONE I'M FROM...
...S' GOT A SKYLINE, LITTER, HOT DOG STANDS...
...BUT IT'S NOT THE SAME.

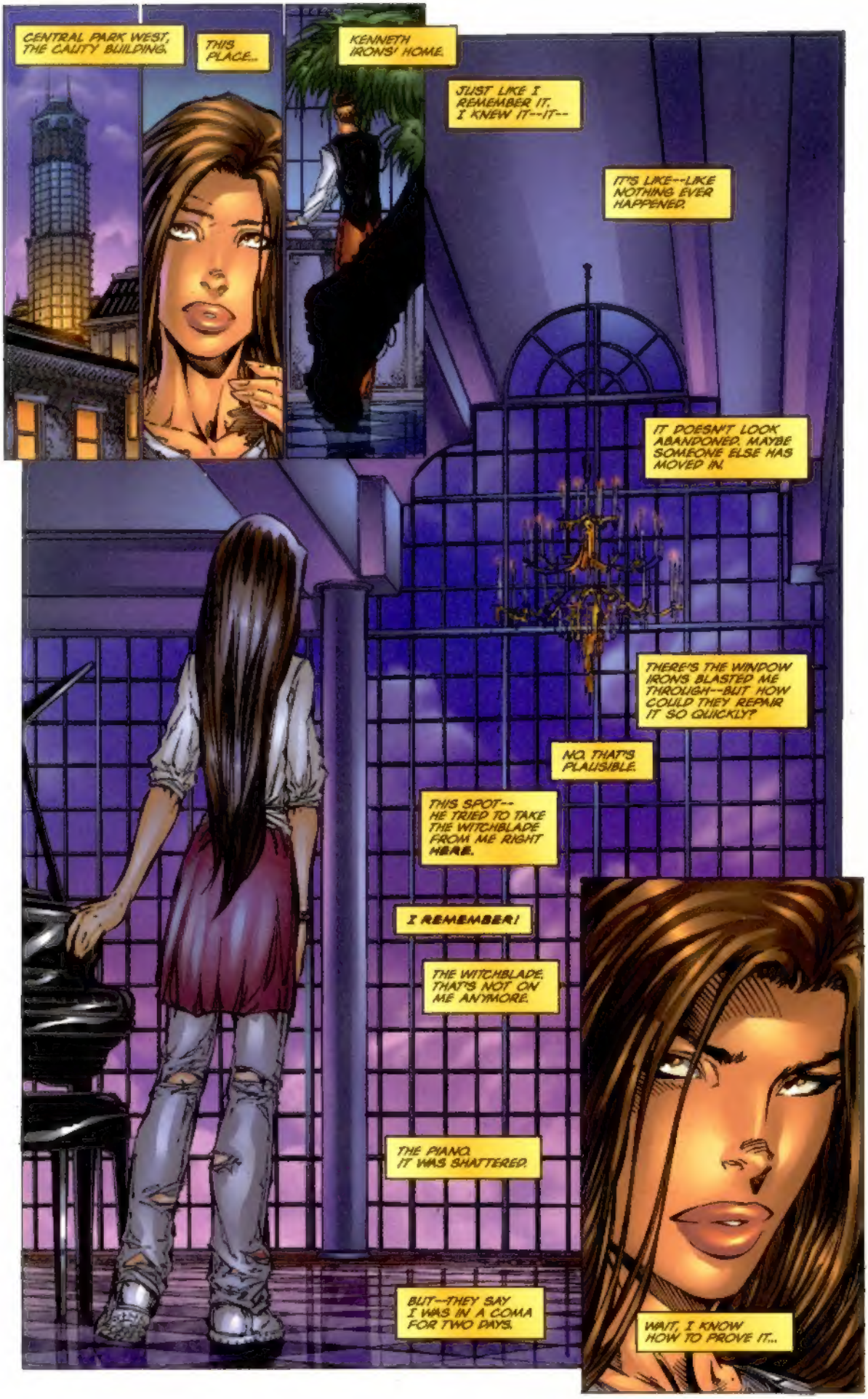
BROOKLYN HEIGHTS. 4:30P.M.
NEW YORK.
IT LOOKS SO DIFFERENT FROM THIS SIDE OF THE EAST RIVER. SO UNREAL.
LAST TIME I HAD A CHANCE TO SEE THIS VIEW, I COULDN'T REALLY ENJOY IT, SINCE I WAS FIGHTING FOR MY LIFE ON LIBERTY ISLAND.
SEEMS LIKE SO LONG AGO.
BUT IT WASN'T. NOT REALLY.
MICHAEL YEE, KEN IRONS, IAN NOTTINGHAM: THEY'RE JUST NAMES NOW. JUST MEMORIES.
ACTUALLY, NOW THEY'RE NAMES ON POLICE FILES INVESTIGATING THEIR DEATHS.
DON'T KNOW HOW I'M GONNA HANDLE THAT ONE.
CHIEF SIRY MAY BE AN UNDERSTANDING GUY, BUT I THINK THE WITCHBLADE AS A CAUSE OF DEATH MAY BE A BIT BEYOND HIS COMPREHENSION.
REGARDLESS, I THINK I SHOULD STOP BY THE STATION AND SEE IF I CAN HAVE A ONE ON ONE WITH HIM...

...GET BACK ON HIS GOOD SIDE.
YEAH, DOCTOR SAYS SHE WAS RELEASED YESTERDAY. BULLET WOUNDS CLOSE TO HEALED.
OH, NO-- NOW WHAT--?
HEEYY, OUR BATTLE-WOUNDED BEAUTY!
UH, HEY GUYS.
CONGRATS, PEZ!
YEAH, WAY TO GO!
UM...
DETECTIVE PEZZINI--
--GET OVER HERE AND REPORT FOR DUTY--
TIME TO QUIT SLACKING! IF THERE'S A PINT OF BLOOD LEFT IN YOU, THE CITY STILL NEEDS YOUR SERVICES.
AND YOU BETTER GET SOME NEW JEANS-- THE CITY AWARDS BANQUET FOR YOU AND MICHAEL IS TOMORROW.
LOOK GUYS, I DON'T-- MICHAEL WHO?
MICHAEL WHOPPPP HOW DARE YOU?

AND TO THINK YOU THOUGHT THIS FACE WAS HANDSOME!
JAKE YOU'RE SO FICKLE!
M-M-MICHAEL-- I--
WHAP!
I-- I DON'T FEEL-- WAIT--


IS THIS HAPPENING?
MICHAEL IS DEAD.
DEAD.
YEAH. I KNOW IT'S AN UGLY BANDAGE. BULLETS GRAZING YOUR HEAD'LL DO THAT TO YOU.
I CAN'T COVER MINE UP LIKE YOU CAN.
NO. I SAW YOU DIE. WHEN I GOT--
--I--IT--THE WITCHBLADE--
I'M DREAMING...
BULLET WOUNDS?
I WAS SHOT.
I'M NOT THINKING STRAIGHT. I--I COULDN'T HAVE DREAMT THIS ALL.
A WATCH?!?
SARA, YOU WERE IN A COMA FOR TWO DAYS. IT'S BEST YOU KEEP RESTED. PLEASE GO HOME AND TAKE IT EASY.
YOU WANT A RIDE, SARA?
N-NO. TH-THANKS, THOUGH.
GUESS ALL THE EXCITEMENT GOT TO HER.

ALL RIGHT. I DON'T LIKE TO DO THIS SORT O' STUFF, BUT I'M GONNA NEED HELP WITH THIS GUY.
THE ONE THING WE HAVE GOIN' FOR US IS THAT THE STENCH O' EVIL IS SO STRONG, I'LL HAVE NO PROBLEM TRACKING HIM DOWN.
HOPE YER BOSSES DON'T MIND THE DIVERSION.
LOGAN, THEY SENT ME HERE TO MAKE SURE THEIR HOLDINGS WERE SAFE. RIGHT NOW, I THINK I CAN SAFELY SAY THAT THEY'RE NOT.
ARE YOU SURE YOU SHOULD BEGIN THIS ALONE?
GOT NO CHOICE, ZOE.
IF THERE'S GONNA BE ANY CHANCE O' SAVING ALL THOSE PEOPLE, I GOTTA GET THIS GAME GOIN'...
...AN' HOPE YA COME UP WITH THE REINFORCE-MENTS BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.


CENTRAL PARK WEST, THE CALITY BUILDING.
THIS PLACE...
KENNETH IRONS' HOME.
JUST LIKE I REMEMBER IT. I KNEW IT--IT--
IT'S LIKE--LIKE NOTHING EVER HAPPENED.
IT DOESN'T LOOK ABANDONED. MAYBE SOMEONE ELSE HAS MOVED IN.
THERE'S THE WINDOW IRONS BLASTED ME THROUGH--BUT HOW COULD THEY REPAIR IT SO QUICKLY?
NO. THAT'S PLAUSIBLE.
THIS SPOT-- HE TRIED TO TAKE THE WITCHBLADE FROM ME RIGHT HERE.
I REMEMBER!
THE WITCHBLADE. THAT'S NOT ON ME ANYMORE.
THE PIANO. IT WAS SHATTERED.
BUT--THEY SAY I WAS IN A COMA FOR TWO DAYS.
WAIT, I KNOW HOW TO PROVE IT...

THE GALLERY ALL THOSE PIECES..
NO..HOW?? THIS IS THE VERY PLACE WHERE ALL THE WITCHBLADE ARTIFACTS WERE--YET--YET NONE OF THESE PAINTINGS RESEMBLE WHAT WAS HERE BEFORE.
THE STATUE IS GONE THE PAINTING OF JOAN OF ARC...THE EGYPTIAN URN.. ALL GONE.
NO. THAT MAKE SENSE, TOO. IF SOMEONE NEW MOVED IN HERE, THEY'D GET RID OF IRONS' WITCHBLADE OBSESSION ARTWORK. I WOULD.
BUT THIS HAS HAPPENED TO COMA PATIENTS BEFORE--WHERE THEY ARE IN A DREAM STATE THAT PARALLELS REALITY JUST BEFORE THEY COME OUT OF IT.
BUT I'D NEVER EVEN BEEN TO THIS PLACE..
AND IT WAS FROM THIS BALCONY THAT-- THAT IAN WAS THROWN FROM AND WHERE KEN KILLED HIMSELF.
I GOT IT--
AND I WANT MORE OF IT!
I DON'T GET IT

MMMMPH...
MY GUN!!! I DON'T HAVE MY GUN!!

I'LL BE MOST HONORED TO SHOW OFF MY GIRLFRIEND IN FRONT OF MY MATES.
I'LL EVEN LET YOU BOSS ME AROUND THE WAY YOU LIKE SINCE YOU'RE STILL A LITTLE WEAK FROM YOUR INJURIES.
AND HERE I'D THOUGHT YOU'D BE READY BY NOW.
WE'VE RESERVATIONS IN AN HALF HOUR AND THE SEAMSTRESS HAS ALREADY DROPPED OFF YOUR DRESS.
GIRLFRIEND? OKAY, MAYBE THIS IS MAKING MORE SENSE NOW I'M SURE THE DOCTOR MUSTVE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT MEMORY LOSS BUT I DONT RECALL.
COULD I HAVE DREAMT THIS WHOLE THING UP CENTERED AROUND MY BOYFRIEND AND MADE HIM THE ENEMY?
MAKES SENSE. IT'S MORE [illegible] A WOMAN WITH A SUPERNATURAL WEAPON. A WEAPON THAT THIS MAN WAS TRYING TO TAKE FROM ME, ALONG WITH HIS BOSS, IRONS.
MAYBE I WAS ENVISIONING HOW I WANT TO BE .A HERO. GOD. THIS IS MAKING SENSE NOW.

WE'RE TO MEET THEM AFTER DINNER, SARA. IF YOU START FEELING WEAK, JUST LET ME KNOW THE DOCTOR SAID IT MAY TAKE A WHILE FOR YOU TO GET BACK YOUR MEMORY. FEEL FREE TO ASK ME ANYTHING
OKAY. DIDN'T YOU TRY TO KILL ME ON LIBERTY ISLAND?! DIDN'T I WATCH YOU FALL OFF THE TERRACE OF YOUR, OR IS IT OUR, APARTMENT?
IAN, HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN SEEING EACH OTHER?
SEEING EACH OTHER? WELL, WE'RE ENGAGED IF THAT TELLS YOU ANYTHING. YOU'VE GOT THE BIGGEST PIECE OF GLASS AT HOME THAT FITS ON THAT GORGEOUS FINGER OF YOURS.
TO TAKE IT BEFORE SURGERY. AND IN CASE YOU DON'T REMEMBER, I WAS YOUR MARTIAL ARTS INSTRUCTOR
GOOD ANSWER. A NORMAL LIFE.
I RECKONED YOU WERE THE BEST IN THE CLASS AND AS MY POLICY, I NEARLY TWISTED YOUR ARM TO HAVE DINNER WITH ME
PROBABLY NOT TOO HARD, I'D IMAGINE...
AND HERE WE ARE NOW
DAMMIT!
WHA?
SARA, GET DOWN!

NICE OUTFIT, PAL. I'D A BEEN FOOLED IF YER *SCENT* WEREN'T SO DARNED *FOUL!*

IAN, WHAT THE HELL--?!?

YOU LITTLE *CREATURE.* HOW *DARE* YOU INTERRUPT MY *DINNER?*

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR GAME IS THIS TIME, *SUB,* BUT YOU'VE GOT A *BUNCH O' INNOCENT VICTIMS* TO *ANSWER FOR!*

GET OUT OF HERE, SARA! I WON'T LET THIS CREATURE GET TO YOU!!!

YOU NEED TO LEARN SOME *MANNERS.*

WHAT IS THIS???
NOW, I HOPE YOU'RE PLANNING ON PAYING FOR THAT WINDOW YOU SO EGREGIOUSLY CRASHED THROUGH...
HMM, JUDGING FROM YOUR APPAREL, I'D GUESS YOU CAN'T.
OH, WELL, I'M SURE I'LL [illegible] SOME WAY TO METE OUT PUNISHMENT.
YER MIND GAMES DON'T WORK ON ME!
NOOOO!!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH THIS JACKET COSTS?
THIS IS REAL.
THAT [illegible] YA GOT?
TOO BAD FER Y--
--OOOOuuuuuHHHHH...

STOP! STOP, LADY
LOOK AROUND YA, THIS IS ALL FAKE!!
WHAP!
WHAT'RE YOU--
OH
WHAT'S GOING ON?
MY WATCH--?
THOSE PEOPLE, WHY IS NO ONE EVEN ACKNOWLEDGING THAT WE'RE [redacted]
THAT'S BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT REAL!
NOW GET--
--OFF ME!!
I'VE GOT HALF A MIND TO GUT YA RIGHT HERE AN' NOW BUT I KNOW YA BEEN DUPED.

PLEASE. THIS CAN'T BE. WHY CAN'T I HAVE A SIMPLE, NORMAL LIFE FOR ONCE?
YOU ARE REAL. IT'S ALL REAL.
DAMN. DAMN.
DAMN!
YA BETTER SNAP OUTTA WHATEVER'S GOING ON IN THAT HEAD O' YOURS, HONEY
'CAUSE YOU'VE BEEN TRICKED BY THE GREATEST O' THEM ALL.
AND IF YA DON'T ACT FAST--
--AHEM.

THOUGH I THOROUGHLY ENJOY YOUR SCINTILLATING UTTERANCES, WOLVERINE...
...I'M BORED.
YES, MS. PEZZINI, A SHOW.
BUT IT WAS ALL FOR YOUR BENEFIT, I ASSURE YOU.
AND YOU PERFORMED ADMIRABLY, AS I KNEW YOU WOULD.
AS DID YOUR CO-STAR, WOLVERINE.
YOU. WHO ARE YOU?
AND WHY ME?

YOU'LL SUFFER FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO ME.

I'M WITH YOU, KID.

I THOUGHT I'D LEARNED MY LESSON.

THE NEXT TIME I WANT TO BELIEVE IN FANTASIES, I'LL REMEMBER WHAT MOM TOLD ME!

ANYTHING THAT'S TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE...

...USUALLY IS.
SSSLLLRRR!
Oooooh..
SKKRRIPP!
YESSS. MAKE ME SUFFER.
SHOW ME WHAT YOU, AND THE WITCHBLADE, CAN DO.
FINE.
LET'S DO IT.
YES.
WOOSHH!
THAT'S IT.

BRAVO.
VERY NICE, SARA.
YOU ARE PER-FECT. A BEAUTIFUL BLEND OF PASSION, RECKLESSNESS, AND CATHOLICISM-BRED GUILT.
WOLVERINE, HERE, COULD LEARN FROM YOU.
BUT WAIT. I DO BELIEVE WE HAVEN'T BEEN PROPERLY INTRODUCED

MY NAME IS MEPHISTO

PERHAPS YOU'VE HEARD OF ME.

I AM THE RULER OF THE UNDERWORLD...

...AND I'VE COME TO TAKE YOUR SOUL

NEXT: WITCHBLADE / ELEKTRA!!